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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses bilingual education and argues for an interdisciplinary approach to language-related problems. Linguists are becoming aware of the moral and social implications of their efforts in the field of bilingual education within the larger context of social engineering, and they need to explore language-related issues in a broader framework which necessarily transcends the confines of academic training. Bilingual education is not the domain of any particular discipline at the present time; rather it extends into cognitive psychology, educational linguistics, educational foundations, and social history. Some issues in these areas of scholarship are reviewed in general terms by way of introduction to non-linguistic solutions to language-related problems. The melting pot hypothesis, seen as favoring the biological and cultural amalgamation of northern Europeans in America to the exclusion of other groups, is discussed, as well as what is termed the myth of social mobility, whereby the public school system is seen as the basic instrument by which the working class can advance within the social structure of American life. Arguments to refute this myth are presented. A final issue concerns differences in cognitive styles among children, and resulting discrimination against non-mainstream children. (Author/CLK)

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INTERDISCIPLINARY ASPECTS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

When linguists were first confronted with some of the problems of bilingualism, they almost instinctively perceived these language-related issues in structural or formal terms. Following the tradition of Weinreich (1953), any contact between languages were explained within the framework of a theory of language interference (Lieberson, 1966). Lacking a broad perspective of the issues of bilingualism, linguists were participating unknowingly as advocates of the melting pot hypothesis (Crevecoeur, 1782), and were oblivious to the rationale behind the movement for compensatory education (Deutsch, 1967; Johnson, 1970; Passow, 1963; and Riessman, 1962).

Only recently have linguists become aware of the moral and social implications of their efforts within the large context of social engineering (Cazden, et al., 1972; Giglioli, 1972; Keddie, 1973; and Spolsky, 1972). Unfortunately, many linguists still remain oblivious to their participating in the process of assigning institutional labels to children (Apple, 1975; Cicourel, et al., 1974), and what is even more insidious is that they are still unaware of their role in the creation and maintenance of the prophecy of self-fulfillment (Rosenthal and Jacobsen, 1968) associated with this pejorative act.

What all of these issues demonstrate is the need for linguists to explore language-related issues in a broader framework which necessarily transcends the narrow confines of their academic training. This requires, in great measure, explorations into the contemporary paradigms of social history, educational foundations, social psychology, and educational theory. Some of these broad areas of scholarship are reviewed in general terms by way of introduction to non-linguistic solutions to language-related problems.

THE MELTING POT HYPOTHESIS

Richard Hofstadter (1955) has convincingly demonstrated that the United States was born in the country; and that from its inception, its political values and ideas were of necessity shaped by the agrarian myth of the yeoman farmer with his quest for independence, his respect for equality, and his desire for self-sufficiency. It was at this time that writers like Thomas Jefferson and Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur (1782), in particular, glorified the virtues of agrarian society. This romantic view of man in nature had its origin in the literary tradition of a classical education with its pastoral poetry, and became a dominant

motif in American history chiefly through the English writers. What is of particular importance about this period of history for bilingual education, however, can be found in the writing of Crevecoeur and his advocacy of the melting pot hypothesis.

> "What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European, or the descendant of a European, hence that strong mixture of blood, which you find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who leaving behind all his prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are one melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great change in the world."
>
> (Crevecoeur, 1912:43)

It is now obvious that the panegyrists of the melting pot hypothesis favored a biological and cultural amalgamation of the northern Europeans, but excluded others.

> "Furthermore, this version of the melting pot omitted from consideration two indigenous peoples, the native American and the Mexicans of the Southwest, as well as that group forcibly brought to America, the black American."
>
> (Ramirez and Castañeda, 1974:6-7)

It is this exclusive group of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants whose ideological system has dominated the mainstream of American life, and provided the basis for a policy of total assimilation in cultural values (Banks, 1975:3-9).

The concept of Social Darwininism (Hofstadter, 1944) was associated with this exclusive version of the melting pot. Despite its liberal overtones, it contained a hidden message of cultural superiority: the child who has not melted is not good enough and is not part of that which the mainstream considers nobler and finer (Ramirez and Castañeda, 1974:7). When the Spencerian doctrine of Social Darwinism came under attack during the age of reform only to be replaced by the Populist movement (Hofstadter, 1955), a similar reaction to the melting pot hypothesis occurred. This took the form of a new ideology, viz., the concept of cultural pluralism (Kallen, 1915). Within this new framework, the term "equal" was singled out from the Declaration of Independence and interpreted as an affirmation of the right to be different. Hence, cultural pluralism reflects an ecology of language and culture. This policy has not been effectively adopted, and it appears that the United States may be on the verge of the

rise of pluralism as a consequence of the decline of White ethnicity and the Protestant ideal (Greenbaum, 1974).

Unfortunately, most American linguists are still naive about these aspects of social history and continue to advocate the ideology and the nomenclature of the melting pot hypothesis. As Fishman and Leuders-Salmon (1972) have astutely shown in their work on the sociology of language, for example, Americans continue to misconstrue the developmental aspects of linguistic diversity, and they even suggest that linguists in this country may have created their own educational problems by their attempts to mainstream bilingual and bicultural students prematurely. In Europe, they argue, linguistic diversity is tolerated while children gradually assimilate toward the mainstream culture and adopt the standard dialect of the country. They are given the opportunity to develop a receptive competence of their school dialect before exacting performance in the classroom is stringently enforced. Due to a strong emphasis on total assimilation and a rigid intolerance toward diversity, bilingual and bicultural children are severely chastized in this country for not having an immediate productive command of the language of the school, and linguists have been instrumental in enforcing this policy by their failure to envision language-related problems outside of the domain of their academic training. Some linguists are content to provide descriptive formulas of linguistic differences; and others insist on monotonous drills based on a theory of language interference. Both groups, however, fail to see the problem from a broader interdisciplinary context in which social and political history play major roles.

THE MYTH OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

For at least a century, reputable scholars in the history of education have been promulgating the view that the public school system in this country is the basic instrument by which the working class can advance within the social structure of American life (Cubberley, 1909; Cremin, 1961; 1965). Waves of financially desolate immigrants, we are told, have come to this country in search of the American dream and have found it in the genius of our educational system (Cremin, 1965). This argument is used against native Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Blacks who fail within our economic system. Their motivation for self improvement is questioned. These claims have been seriously challenged by Collin Greer (1972), Michael Katz (1971), John Mann (1975), and other historiographers of education. There is no evidence, they argue, in favor of the traditional interpretation of the American school policy. In fact, it turns out that there is an abundance of evidence against it. The dropout rate among the immigrants in this country ranges from forty to sixty per cent over the last century (Greer, 1972; 1973; and Karier, et al., 1973), and those who complete their basic education have not been advanced, but remain as part of the working class (Illich, 1970). Collin Greer (1973) considers the distinction between the alleged successful immigrants and other ethnic groups a subterfuge. It hides the fact that the real problem is political in nature, because the school system serves and protects the interest of the ruling class. Illich (1970) agrees with

this view and has advocated the separation of social control of the school by his program of deschooling society. If these scholars are correct in their assessments of our educational system, it dramatizes the need for interdisciplinary research and demonstrates the fact that the solution to problems in bilingual education are partly political in nature.

A similar interpretation of the British school system can be found in the writing of Dennis Lawton (1975). He describes their system as one in which two separate school systems were in existence with its own special curricula. The elitist were schooled in the classical foundations of Latin and Greek, and they knowingly used this knowledge as a badge of their exclusive rank. All other children were schooled in those basic skills that would enable them to understand simple written instructions and to successfully perform elementary calculations. These were the skills necessary for a competent labor force, and it was in the purview of the educational system to provide the market. In 1944, however, the British school system allegedly moved toward egalitarian education, but the polemics of the political and social role of the school still continues. Lawton, I might mention, arrives at a different conclusion from our historians of education. He contends that the schools should concern themselves with imparting a common culture rather than the dictates of a special class. He predicates this view on the assumption expressed by Karl Mannheim (Wolff, 1971) that different social classes in the community are limited by their environment and experiences in the perception of reality. As a consequence, he argues, they are also limited in their access to knowledge. The schizophrenia of the citizenry can be resolved, he concludes, by the development of a common curriculum. Lawton's approach of incorporating the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckman, 1966; and Holzner, 1968) is appealing, and may even provide an alternative to the deschooling of society (Illich, 1970). In this country, Aaron Cicourel (1974) and his associates (Cicourel, et al., 1974; and Turner, 1974) have complemented the work of Lawton (1975) in their investigations of the methods of selection within the school system.

COGNITIVE STYLES

Another view which should have implications for bilingual education, and which is concomitant with the work of Lawton (1975) can be found in the work of Ramirez and Castañeda (1974). They provide some interesting evidence in substantiation of the claim that children who are raised in different cultural settings develop a pattern for coping with life, and that this special strategy which they acquire conflicts with the cognitive style of the school. This difference in cognitive styles, they argue, is the source of many problems in the bilingual classroom. The two styles that they refer to are "field independence" and "field sensitivity." The former is characteristically associated with children who tend to perceive items as discrete from the organized field which contains them. The field independent children, it is argued, are oriented towards the left cerebral hemisphere of the brain (TenHouten, 1971), and tend to do well in speech, reading, and writing. Those who are field sensitive, on the other hand,

are oriented towards the right cerebral hemisphere and their forte is manifested in such gestalt tasks as music, and visio-spatial cognition. Chicanos, according to Ramirez and Castaneda (1974), are field sensitive, whereas Anglos are field independent. This fact, they argue, is at the base of many educational problems in the bilingual classroom. Since the school only recognizes and rewards students who are field independent, and since both cognitive styles are needed to successfully function within the spectrum of society, one can only conclude that children are all victims of compulsory mis-education. To counteract this disparity in the perceptual strategies which children use, these educational psychologists have developed and tested a training program to assist children in becoming bicognitive. Their success in this venture on many ethnic groups is now a matter of record.

CONCLUSION

This discussion of bilingual education argues for an interdisciplinary approach to language-related problems. It should be evident from some of the references cited that bilingual education is not the domain of any particular discipline at the present time, but requires the concerted effort of cognitive psychology, educational linguistics, educational foundations, and social history. Although the linguists have been singled out for discussion, a similar argument could be made for other language scientists working in the area of bilingual education.

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